

LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION; HOW NASHVILLE HEARD THE NEWS.

[In the *Journal of Illinois Historical Society* for October, 1914, is found a very interesting article written by Captain William H. Gay of Quincy, Illinois. This officer was stationed at Nashville during the winter and spring of 1864-5. His description of how the news of President Lincoln's death was received in Nashville is indeed worthy to be recorded in our annals.—*Ed.*]

I was at the time of this, our crowning disaster, stationed with my company at Nashville, Tenn., where we were quartered during the winter and spring of 1864-65. Here Thomas had met Hood on the 15th and 16th of December and well nigh annihilated his army. Sherman had marched to the sea with little opposition, making clear the weakness of the Confederacy; Grant was moving to capture Lee, all of which gave hope and promise that the end was near. And now we were hourly looking for news of surrender.

On the morning of April 10, 1865, the anxious waiting was brought to rest by the glad news of the surrender. The end had come, and the joy of it brought out wild demonstrations of delight and shouts of victory from thousands of Union soldiers encamped at Nashville. Immediately an order to fire a salute of fifty guns was issued to celebrate this great victory, and my battery had the honor to be selected to perform this service.

My company occupied Fort Negley. This fort was situated on the highest point, a short distance south of the city, and was mounted with guns of heavy and light caliber, which covered all the southern approaches to the city.

We must celebrate! was the spontaneous sentiment of the loyal army and the loyal citizens of Nashville; and Saturday, the 15th of April, was fixed as the day to give expression to the exultation of triumph that took possession of us all; for it seemed that the winter of our discontent and the glorious summertime of peace had come.

And so on the appointed day Nashville put on her brightest robes to shine beautiful in this hour of the nation's joy. It was a rare spectacle of patriotic splendor, well fitting the occasion. The army was to march in grand review, accoutred as for war. It was a brilliant and inspiring sight to see the different commands marching to take position in the great line of march. Bands of music and fife and drum broke the air with soul-stirring music. The infantry and artillery were marching in separate columns. I was riding at the head of the column of artillery. When turning in College Street to take the position assigned us I looked down the street and saw a horseman riding toward me at a rapid gallop. As he drew near I recognized General Thomas' chief of artillery, and I noticed at once he was moved by some deep and powerful emotion. When he reached my side he said, in a voice of deepest intensity, "Have you heard the dreadful news?"

I then realized that something terrible had happened, and, halting my command, I replied, "No; what is it?" He replied, "President Lincoln and Secretary Seward were assassinated last night!"

For a moment this appalling announcement so staggered me and benumbed my senses that I was speechless and reeled in my saddle, nearly overcome. It was a dreadful moment to meet, and the shock of it affected me the remainder of the day.

I do not remember that I gave utterance to a single word but

rode silently down to the Public Square, where I met Governor Brownlow, Mr. Rodgers, president of the State Senate, and the speaker of the House of Representatives. "Parson" Brownlow had recently been inaugurated Governor of Tennessee. It was a gloomy meeting. The Governor was seated in his carriage, looking the embodiment of misery. His strong, honest face showed the marks of distress he felt within. In a low, faltering voice he gave me all the facts then known, and I passed on to learn more, if possible, at headquarters.

The rank and file were now getting hold of the dreadful news, and the glad acclaim of the morning soon subsided into subdued mutterings of resentful discontent. The beautiful flags, which had floated triumphantly in the breezes, were dropped to half-mast. Joy was turned to sorrow and hilarity to grief. Further proceedings in the program of the day was stopped, and the troops were sent back to their quarters. Minute guns were ordered to be fired till sundown, and the First Iowa and another battery at Fort Johnson were detailed to perform this service.

And now came a rallying from the first shock of this awful calamity, and with a deeper sense of irreparable loss, and it awakened the deepest indignation, increasing as the hours passed on, till it reached the flood gate of such intensity that many of the well-known southern cities sought safety in hiding. Some less cautious in speech declared their satisfaction and were shot dead on the spot by an outraged soldiery.

I remained in my quarters the most of the day pondering over the possible consequences of this unexpected crisis at such a critical moment in the affairs of the nation. Abraham Lincoln gone! This man of the hour! This man who held in his hands a divine mission to humanity to solve the problem of the unshackled bondsmen, and to finish the great task still remaining, to uplift and make a place for a ransomed people. Gone!

And this is the man whose birthday all the people unite to honor each year. And for his deeds and for his humanity he will forever stand out the grandest figure in American history. His is the type of greatness that will endure, for he was the incarnation of human rights.